Disk organizer difficult to load

Managing files and directories on a hard disk is tough if you use only the Spartan commands that come with DOS.

Most users opt for one or more utilities that enhance DOS and hard disk management. One such program is the new Disk Director.

Like most hard disk utilities for IBM and IBM-compatible PCs, Disk Director offers a visual depiction of the structure on your hard disk. In addition, through pull-down menus and dialogue boxes, it lets you run mundane DOS commands with flair. It even throws in some tricks of its own.

Since most experienced users consider this type of program to be a luxury, I set out to see if this particular one contained any special features that would warrant its purchase by most business offices.

Disk Director claims to be less of a file manager and more of an overall hard disk organizer. Here are some of the unusual things it can do:

■ Group files using "phantom" directories. You can organize files from different directories — and

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even different drives — into a new directory. This phantom directory looks like any other directory in Disk Director, but instead of moving files around, it just holds references to where they are really stored.

■ List all duplicate files on a drive. Here a phantom directory is created that lists the names of all like-named files on a hard disk. If you've never run a "dupe checking" utility on your disk, you're in for a surprise. Over time, everyone's disk drive becomes cluttered with scores of files needlessly duplicated in various directories. Deleting these dupes will typically free up a great deal of space on your disk.

structures or "branches." You can highlight a block of directories from the main tree display and re-

locate them elsewhere on the tree. All the parent and child relationships are maintained in the move — regardless of where the branch is "reattached." Most other programs are far more clumsy in this area as they force you to move just one directory at a time.

■ Use as menu system that executes programs. In addition to its file organizing functions, Disk Director can act as a shell program. By treating the file listings as a menu, you can highlight and then start any executable program. When the program ends, it returns you to the main menu.

■ Attach comments to drives, directories and files. By adding short comments — 34 characters for drives, 78 for directories and files — you can jog your memory about a file's contents or help another user understand the contents of various directories.

On the downside, the program takes a long time to load and does not handle most common functions — those that you would use every day, like renaming and copying files — as easily or as quickly as

other programs.

It took 45 seconds to load Disk Director on my computer, which is maddeningly slow if you need to use it repeatedly during your work day. Then it listed only a limited number of files in random order on the screen.

■ The Bottom Line: I think every PC user would be wise to learn at least the basic DOS file commands. If all your file management skills are through one utility program, you'll be stumped if you ever have to use another computer without that program.

Disk Director has some impressive specialized features that may appeal to some advanced users, but overall, I found it too time-consuming for day-to-day needs.

Disk Director is available from Athena Software, 4915 Twin Lakes Road, Suite 19, Boulder 80301; (303) 666-9569. It costs $79.

Hillel Segal's weekly column evaluates gadgets, small-computer hardware and software, seminars, and books designed to enhance business productivity.